Face-To-Face

A program to improve understanding of international issues through direct communication between Government officials and private citizens sponsored jointly by the American Foreign Service Association and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Room 503, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone (202) 332-6929

April 17, 1974

A NUCLEAR STRATEGY DISCUSSION

jointly sponsored with

THE ARMS CONTROL ASSOCIATION

Dear Colleague:

On January 10, 1974, Face-to-Face and the Arms Control Association jointly sponsored a discussion of the "Schlesinger Doctrine" of increased flexibility in nuclear strategy. In a meeting moderated by Tom Schelling, Harry Rowen and Dick Garwin debated a number of aspects of the issue, ranging from the merits of selective counterforce strategies to the utility of tactical nuclear weapons to the fundamental question of the continued validity of assured destruction as a cornerstone of deterrence theory.

Encouraged by your comments after this meeting, and confused by the public debate on the subject which has taken place over the past few months, we have decided to sponsor more opportunities for what we hope will be rational discussions of nuclear strategy.

Accordingly, we are inviting you to another evening's encounter with strategic nuclear planning. On Wednesday, May 1, we will meet over cocktails and dinner at the Foreign Service Club to talk with Herbert Scoville, Jr., a critic of the new flexibility, about some of the implications of the new doctrine for arms control planning, America's alliance policies, and for the weapons procurement process.

Mr. Scoville, presently a consultant to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, has served as Assistant Director of ACDA for Science and Technology, and Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He is the author of numerous articles on arms control and national security issues, and the co-author, with cartoonist Robert Osborn, of "Missile Madness", a primer on the U.S.-Soviet arms race. One of his

most recent publications, a critique of the Schlesinger doctrine, entitled: "Flexible MADness", appeared in the spring issue of Foreign Policy. A reprint of his article is enclosed.

Our goal in these discussions is to achieve a maximum exchange of views with an emphasis on fundamental questions and a minimum of jargon. As usual the group will include participants from State, Defense, other Executive Branch agencies, the Hill, the media, think-tanks, etc. And, following our custom, the format will be:

-- 6:30 p.m. - drinks

-- 7:00 - 7:30 p.m. - opening remarks

-- 7:30 - 8:00 p.m. - initial discussion

-- 8:00 p.m. - dinner

-- 8:45 - 10:15 p.m. - discussion.

The place: The Foreign Service Club, (2101 E St., NW). And, again, the date: Wednesday, May 1, 1974.

We look forward to your participation. Please call Mrs. Haskins (332-6929) to let us know your plans.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Halsted

David E. Biltchik

P.S. Mr. Proctor:

I hope you can make this. I have also invited your colleagues Carl Duckett, Howard Stoertz and [redacted] You might want to talk to them and encourage them to come. STAT

I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

David Biltchik B Haskins

Wednesday, 1 May 1974

Face-to-Face Program
"A Nuclear Strategy Discussion"

The Foreign Service Club
2101 E Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C.

1830	Drinks
1900-1930	Opening Remarks
1930-2000	Initial Discussion
2000	Dinner
2045-2215	Discussion

Messrs. Stoertz and [redacted] STAT
are riding over with Mr. Proctor.

STAT [redacted]

Mr. Duckett was invited but will
be unable to attend.

RSVPed Mrs. Haskins (332-6929)
that Mr. Proctor would attend
on 26 April.

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FLEXIBLE MADNESS?

by Herbert Scoville, Jr.

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FLEXIBLE MADNESS?

by Herbert Scoville, Jr.

On January 10, 1974, Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger announced that "there has taken place . . . a change in the strategies of the U.S. with regard to the hypothetical employment of central strategic forces." A goal voiced since 1970 in President Nixon's annual foreign policy statements is now apparently an accomplished fact: "flexible response" has replaced "deterrence of nuclear war by assured destruction" as the cornerstone of our strategic policy. We now propose to respond to Soviet nuclear aggression by attacking a variety of military targets instead of by massive retaliation against cities. As Schlesinger makes clear, this flexibility can be obtained by revised targeting doctrine and improved command and control procedures, and does not necessarily require additional weapons; on the other hand, new specialized weapons with higher accuracies, greater explosive powers, and more warheads will also increase our efficiency for destroying military targets. However, the repercussions on our security and on the arms race from these approaches toward increased flexibility can be quite different. The consequences of this move away from mutual assured destruction (known as MAD by its detractors)—by which nuclear war has so far been avoided—are profound, and vitally affect our survival. The new strategy and the alternate ways it can be implemented should be carefully examined before we are irretrievably launched on this new path.

The catastrophic effects of the explosion of even a few nuclear weapons on this country have made the avoidance of strategic war the overriding objective of our strategic policies for 20 years. Since defense was impossible against an all-out Soviet nuclear attack,

we have been forced to rely on deterrence based on an ability to produce unacceptable damage in retaliation.

The ABM *Treaty*

The ABM Treaty signed in Moscow on May 26, 1972, formally established deterrence as the basic strategic policy of both the United States and the Soviet Union. Both countries agreed to forego the acquisition of a capability for defending their territories and thus guaranteed, for the foreseeable future, a state of mutual deterrence. With all missile warheads, once launched, having an assured arrival on target, even the most exaggerated fears over the security of our retaliatory capability of thousands of warheads became groundless. The basic goal of our strategic policy for 20 years finally had a stable, more permanent foundation.

With this success, our strategic policies might have been expected to remain fixed for at least a short time, but the ink was hardly dry on the Treaty before the Administration raised questions about the desirability of a strategic policy based solely on deterrence. It sought to achieve the additional strategic objective of "flexibility" when Secretary Laird, with White House support, requested funds for the development of a "hard target" MIRV, i.e., multiple warheads with sufficient accuracy and yield for each warhead to have a high probability of destroying enemy missile sites and command centers. These weapons were supposed to provide a "flexible response" in the event of a limited Soviet nuclear attack. That this would look to the Russians like an attempt to develop a first strike capability on our part, and would erode the mutual deterrent posture so recently agreed to by the Treaty, was ignored. However, the Senate, which even during the SALT negotiations had expressed concern over the destabilizing nature of such weapons, refused to authorize funds for this development in the aftermath

of SALT. Thus, the program was driven underground. In all probability it was continued under the program for the development of advanced ballistic reentry systems (ABRES). Now Schlesinger admits this and openly endorses proceeding with attempts to improve the accuracy of our MIRV—and giving it a more efficient silo-destroying capability. A confrontation between Congress and the Executive could come when specific funds are sought for missiles with new and potentially more accurate guidance systems.

The concept of flexible response in which military installations, not cities, would be the targets of a retaliatory attack, did not of course arise full blown in the immediate aftermath of the SALT I agreements. Secretary McNamara proclaimed a "city avoiding" strategy in 1962 at a NATO conference, but this strategy was rapidly discarded. On February 18, 1970, President Nixon, in his first report to the Congress on U.S. foreign policy for the 1970's, posed the question: "Should a President, in the event of a nuclear attack, be left with the single option of ordering the mass destruction of enemy civilians, in the face of the certainty that it would be followed by the mass slaughter of Americans?" It is from these questions that the concept of flexible response flows. In the immediate years following, there was little public elaboration of what the President had in mind, but he repeated these generalities in later foreign policy reports. It was not until after Moscow that we saw a specific weapons program defended on the basis of this policy goal.

Since May 1972, many national security analysts have publicly questioned the desirability of our deterrent policy. Some, such as Donald Brennan, had long felt that a defense-oriented strategy—i.e., one that relied on extensive defenses to protect populations and to permit a nation to survive—was far superior to one relying on deterrence through offense, and used the occasion of the

Moscow summit to restate their views. They decried the current state of mutual assured destruction, sanctified by the ABM Treaty, as MAD. These arguments, which have not been widely accepted by either the military or arms controllers, do not provide support for a policy of flexible response and should be differentiated therefrom. A defense-oriented policy does not provide flexibility; quite the contrary, extensive defenses on both sides preclude a flexible response because large-scale retaliation is needed to overwhelm enemy defenses in order to achieve even a limited goal. Thus, the restrictions on ABM's agreed to in Moscow in May 1972 provided opportunities for increased flexibility previously unavailable. Paradoxically, those most opposed to ABM limitations are the strongest supporters of increased flexibility.

Deterrence Under Attack

The deterrent policy has, however, come under fire on a number of other counts which have been persuasive to some on all sides of the strategic debate. Fred Iklé,[1] who was later appointed the head of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, attacked the "balance of terror" approach as a morally repugnant national policy. Instead, retaliation should be aimed at the assured destruction of military, industrial, and transportation assets. Iklé also condemns deterrence as directed entirely to the rational mind, and points out that nuclear war will only occur as a result of accident or an irrational decision. Other writers have argued that a wider range of retaliatory options is needed in response to military or political provocations more limited than an all-out first strike. They argue that massive retaliation may be a less effective deterrent than a selective one because its implementation lacks credibility.

Certainly the strategic policy of deterrence under which peace is maintained by holding

[1] *Fred Charles Iklé, "Can Nuclear Deterrence Last Out The Century?"* Foreign Affairs, *January 1973.*

hostage tens or even hundreds of millions of people, and by putting modern civilization in jeopardy, is psychologically unsatisfying. According to this concept, the more inevitable the devastation, the more stable the peace. We are right to seek some alternative, but we must not discard a policy that has worked until all the implications are evaluated.

To be successful, any alternative must decrease the risks of a nuclear conflagration. If, in the process of moving out from under the umbrella of mutual deterrence, we were to increase significantly the probability that nuclear warfare, no matter how limited, will start, then the new policy will be self-defeating. Therefore, the primary criterion for any new strategic policy must be *the assurance that it will in no way increase the likelihood that nuclear warfare will be unleashed.* A limited nuclear conflict presents a major risk of uncontrollable escalation to widespread nuclear devastation so that almost no gain is worth risking an increase in the probability that it will occur.

The ideal goal for a flexible response would be to have the weapons, together with their command and control, which could provide an appropriate response or variety of responses to any potential provocation. A small attack could be followed by a limited response. A purely military conflict could involve a retaliation against military targets alone. Ideally, one might like to be able to destroy a missile launcher, a command post, or even an artillery piece without causing any damage to the civilian sector. In practice, however, such surgical nuclear strikes would be hard or impossible to achieve. The controlling factor in determining civil destruction is the distance from the target, not the accuracy of the missile.

Because we have adopted a policy of deterrence through assured destruction and because in evaluating the effectiveness of our deterrent force we normally test it in the ex-

treme case of all-out retaliation following a massive Soviet first strike, it is often assumed that we have no flexibility today and have no recourse in the event of aggression but to retaliate with our entire strategic force. The plaintive note in President Nixon's statements and the tenor of Schlesinger's remarks would seem to support this. Of course, this is not true, as Wolfgang Panofsky has shown in his response to Iklé.[2] We are not limited to the single option of full-scale strategy retaliation to deter any aggression; we never have been. We have large conventional forces in both Europe and the Far East; escalation to nuclear weapons is not required as an early response to a conventional attack.

On the other hand, the deployment in exposed locations near frontiers of many of our nuclear weapons could needlessly lead to nuclear conflict. This decreases our flexibility to deal with the situation at the non-nuclear level and greatly enhances the risk of nuclear war. The 7,000 tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and appreciable numbers in Korea should, even if moved to rear areas, be a sufficient deterrent against the introduction of nuclear weapons by the other side. We need not rely on our strategic stockpile for this purpose.

Even at the strategic level, President Nixon is not forced, with the weapons now available, to launch an all-out attack against Soviet cities knowing that our society might be similarly destroyed in response. A variety of less cataclysmic strategic retaliatory options has always been available provided that appropriate command and control procedures were adopted. The United States now has the weapons to respond at lower levels if it so desires, although not always with optimum effectiveness. Although it is not obvious why such a capability is needed,

[2] *Wolfgang K. H. Panofsky, "The Mutual-Hostage Relationship Between America And Russia,"* Foreign Affairs, *October 1973.*

some—but by no means all—Russian ICBM sites can with high confidence be put out of action. We can destroy military command centers, but as long as they are located near population centers, not without collateral damage to the civilian sector. Even if we improve the accuracy of our nuclear weapons, there will always be serious side effects.

Increased Deterrence Or Risk?

The topical question, therefore, is not whether one wishes to have a flexible response, but whether additional capabilities will increase deterrence or instead increase the risk that nuclear war will actually break out. Enhanced flexibility from improved command and control is probably on balance a positive step since it does not threaten a significant portion of the deterrent force and could reduce the risk of accidents. Furthermore, it provides more flexibility *not* to be forced to undertake certain responses. Deterrence provided by fear of possible massive retaliation would remain unaffected. On the other hand, the desire for more flexible weapons can become an open-ended justification for new, expensive programs and will certainly push the arms race further along the road.

No matter how often we disclaim it, the development of improved silo-killing missiles must inevitably look to the Russians like an attempt to acquire a first-strike counterforce capability against their ICBM's. Similar Soviet programs for getting high-yield MIRV's have been viewed here in exactly such alarming terms. One response to the increased threat to military forces provided by improved counterforce capabilities could be expensive programs by the other side to reduce their vulnerability. New missiles in superhardened silos or mobile ICBM's are two that have been proposed in the United States. The Russians will almost certainly react to our moves in some manner. A cheaper way is to shorten the time fuse on the nuclear mis-

siles by adopting "launch on warning" operational procedures with all the increased risks of accidental war that this would provide. False alarms are difficult to completely rule out. While we may not wish to give up the option for an early response to an attack, we certainly do not wish to be in a position where we have no other choice than retaliation before any weapons have been exploded. Nor do we wish to force the So-

"The overriding objective is to prevent nuclear wars, not fight them."

viet Union, China, or any other nuclear power to place their missiles on a hair trigger alert. Thus, weapons programs designed for improved flexibility have the potentiality to greatly increase the risk of nuclear war.

An extreme, albeit much discussed, scenario in which increased flexibility is considered desirable has been put forth by leading military planners. It involves a Russian attack on our land-based ICBM's and intercontinental bombers after which they would dictate terms of our surrender. A U.S. response which required devastation of Soviet populations is, according to this scenario, not credible since it, in turn, could trigger Russian annihilation of urban centers in the United States. We might have a greater deterrent against such a Soviet action if we had the alternative of knocking out those Soviet missiles which had not yet been launched.

Is this scenario at all credible, and if so, what would increased flexible response buy? In order to have high confidence of knocking out the U.S. force of more than 1,000 ICBM launchers, the Russians would have to fire, at a minimum, two to three megaton warheads at each launcher. In order to have a high probability of destroying hard targets such as missile silos, the weapons would have to be detonated very close to the surface of the earth, producing heavy radio-

active fallout directly downwind. A single 15 megaton explosion at Eniwetok in 1954 covered an area of 5,000 square miles, extending 200 miles downwind, with fallout which would have been lethal to exposed populations. Even larger areas were covered with very serious contamination. Yet in this scenario an attack would produce fallout two hundred or more times as great. If an attack against our bombers is added to that against the missiles, the devastation would be still worse. Millions of people would be killed and large sectors of our society completely disorganized, even though the attack was directed with surgical precision at military targets.

Even if completely successful, what would the Russians have accomplished? True, they might have destroyed a large part of the land-based missile and bomber elements of our deterrent Triad; but our submarine missile force of 41 Polaris-Poseidon submarines, with more than 5,000 nuclear warheads and yields several times that of the Hiroshima bomb, would still be untouched. We would still have an overwhelming strategic force which would not only be a threat to the survival of the Soviet Union as a civilized society, but which would have a capability of destroying hundreds of military targets as well. Without the necessity of overpowering a large ABM, now foreclosed by the ABM Treaty, command centers and an appreciable number of (but not all) missile silos can be destroyed by Poseidon with its present accuracy by allocating sufficient warheads to each target. Does such an attack, even if completely successful, leave the Soviet Union in a position to dictate terms to the U.S. government? Are any possible gains commensurate with the risks that any U.S. government might retaliate against Soviet population centers and devastate the Soviet Union, even though such an action might mean a similar devastation in the United States from those Soviet weapons not used in the first

strike? Any Soviet leader in contemplating such a "limited attack" would have to take into consideration that even with the firmest intentions of exercising restraint, the U.S. leaders might be stampeded into a retaliation which would kill millions of Russians in exchange for the millions of Americans already killed. Democratic leaders have more difficulty than dictators in remaining wholly rational since they must frequently respond to popular passions.

Moreover, would an improved capability for a flexible response have any important effect under such a scenario? Procuring ICBM's with greater accuracy and, consequently, a higher single-shot probability for destroying an ICBM silo would be of little value and a waste of money, since most of our ICBM's, according to this scenario, would have been destroyed. Giving a larger payload to some Minuteman missiles would be similarly ineffective. Increased accuracy for our invulnerable submarine missiles might more effectively destroy any Soviet ICBM's that had not been used in the initial salvo, and the collateral damage in areas surrounding the Soviet missile sites would be reduced. But even if we destroyed all leftover ICBM's, the Russians would still have hundreds of submarine-launched ballistic missiles with which to threaten our undefended cities. How would the existence of such an improved hard-target capability affect a Soviet decision to launch such an attack in the first place? It is hard to see why they would be more deterred because the United States could retaliate in a limited way. If the Russians were willing to launch an attack of this scale, they would certainly be prepared to have all their remaining land-based missiles destroyed. They would be thankful that they had gotten off so cheaply. If any aggressor were so irrational as to contemplate such an extreme action, he might be more prone to risk it if he thought that the United States would be more likely to respond in a limited way than

with a devastating attack. In sum, aggression on this scale provides no gains even marginally commensurate with the risks; greater potential flexibility in response would probably not improve deterrence and might instead increase the danger that such an attack would occur.

A Second Example

Since this extreme case is so unreal, some less extensive form of nuclear aggression should be examined. Suppose, for example, the Soviet Union decided to destroy one Minuteman complex of 100 missiles as a muscle-flexing exercise and a demonstration of the superiority of its missiles. Under such circumstances, it could be argued that the United States might wish to respond with less than massive destruction; we might want a capability for a retaliation in kind. In the absence of a Soviet ABM, we could do this today with our present forces by expending several of the undamaged Minuteman warheads per Soviet silo. An improved U.S. hard-target capability would make such graduated retaliation easier but is unlikely to affect a Soviet decision to adopt such a strategy in the first place. The political gains from such a conflict even for the winner are hard to imagine and are certainly out of all proportion to the risks.

This is not the kind of contest which we should wish to enter or even encourage. This limited scenario is one which is probably considered only by players of war games who have lost touch with the meaning of nuclear war. Such irrational leaders would more likely be deterred by the consequences of all-out retaliation than by the thought that we might try to play in this game—a game in which they might always hope to come out ahead. The gains from being able to fight this type of battle more effectively are far outweighed by increased risks that it might actually be fought.

A central question which arises in any

scenario is whether a better capability to respond to aggression at a variety of levels enhances deterrence through greater credibility of a response, or whether the possibility that retaliation will be limited in scope reduces the inhibitions against aggression through decreased fear of the consequences. A second and perhaps more critical question is whether the improved ability to respond at lower levels of violence increases the risk that nuclear war will erupt. The latter cannot be tolerated.

The deterrent must be made credible to rational and, insofar as possible, to irrational decision-makers alike. Since nuclear aggression on any scale is today almost always irrational, greater attention should probably be directed toward the less rational leaders and toward those situations where rational decision-making might be more difficult. Deterrence would probably be more effective if fewer opportunities were provided in which a leader might believe, or be led to believe, that he could fight a nuclear war, survive, and perhaps even win.

The initiation of nuclear war at any level is a disaster that is more likely to occur if national leaders can fool themselves into believing that it might be kept small and that they might come out the victors. This is less likely to occur in any specific crisis if the military have not prepared plans long in advance and acquired specially designed weapons to fight a limited nuclear war.

Nuclear war might be made less likely if the decision to initiate it can be made more difficult rather than easier. Over the past 25 years, strong firebreaks have been built between conventional and nuclear war. Even when overwhelming nuclear superiority existed, no nation seriously contemplated using nuclear weapons in even the most limited way. Korea and Vietnam, both large-scale conventional conflicts, have passed without their use. Despite many rumors of their intention, the Russians have never initiated a

nuclear strike to eliminate the emerging Chinese nuclear force. The soundest and most moral policy would maintain, and if possible strengthen, all the firebreaks that exist, not only between conventional and nuclear weapons, but also between tactical and strategic weapons. The development of improved capabilities for fighting strategic nuclear war at a lower level, thereby fusing tactical and strategic nuclear conflict, is only a step in the wrong direction. It is misguided thinking to believe that deterrence against nuclear war can be improved by increasing the likelihood that strategic nuclear weapons will be used.

Safety And Control

Instead of procuring new weapons with improved nuclear war-fighting characteristics, efforts should be directed toward improving the safety and the command and control over the weapons now available. The several agreements with the Soviet Union designed to improve communication and to prevent nuclear warfare are useful steps. Tremendous advances have been made over the past 10 years with the incorporation of devices in many nuclear weapons to prevent unauthorized firing. However, there is still a long way to go. Particular attention should be paid to control procedures for our missile submarines. Operationally-oriented officers have inordinate fears that more rigid safety and control procedures would make it more difficult to use nuclear weapons in the event that war breaks out. Such inverted thinking must be rooted out; the overriding objective is to prevent nuclear wars, not fight them. Our deterrent is not improved by looser controls; no nation will risk a holocaust on the slim hope that our command system will break down.

The dangers of inadvertent nuclear war do not arise solely from a U.S.-Soviet confrontation. The smaller Chinese force presents even more explosive potentialities than do the much larger U.S. and Russian

forces. Because of its limited size, it could be vulnerable to a U.S. or Soviet first strike since concealment or hardening can never be relied on completely. As a consequence, its leaders could feel forced to place a hair trigger on their weapons and adopt a launch-on-warning operational tactic. Thus, it is in our national interest to try to insure that the Chinese have a deterrent in which they can be confident without requiring rapid response. Such confidence may be difficult to attain as long as the Soviet Union and the United States have their present overwhelmingly superiority. When the Chinese acquire their first ICBM's we should not, at the very least, take any steps which might look like an attempt to maintain a first strike threat against them.

Does increased flexibility alleviate the understandable concerns of those who find a peace maintained by threats of annihilation morally repugnant? Making it easier to fight nuclear wars, even on a limited scale, is hardly a psychologically more attractive policy. It is probably more moral to prevent slaughter by threatening disaster than to facilitate limited death and destruction. True moral satisfaction will come only when we succeed in moving away from nuclear conflict as a means of settling international differences.

In conclusion, the objective of improving the flexibility of our strategic weapons to provide the President with additional strategic options beyond those now available is a goal which sounds superficially attractive, but which, in practice, can only decrease our security. Making it easier to fight strategic nuclear war does not truly enhance deterrence and only increases the risk that fears of nuclear devastation will turn into reality. Instead of buying new weapons with more sophisticated war-fighting capabilities, efforts should be concentrated on increasing the control over, and the safety of, the weapons we now have.